

THE **BUFFALO BILL**

A WEEKLY PUBLICATION

STORIES

DEVOTED TO BORDER HISTORY

Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 70-80 Seventh Ave., N. Y.

No. 228.

Price, Five Cents.

HARRY M. LANE.

BUFFALO BILL'S AIR VOYAGE

OR FIGHTING REDSKINS FROM A BALLOON



"Let her go, professor!" shouted Buffalo Bill. The balloon instantly shot upwards, dragging the three redskins with it.



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 Beware of Wild West imitations of the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are about fictitious characters. The Buffalo Bill weekly is the only weekly containing the adventures of Buffalo Bill, (Col. W. F. Cody), who is known all over the world as the king of scouts.

No. 228.

NEW YORK, September 23, 1905.

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BUFFALO BILL'S AIR VOYAGE;

OR, HARRY M. LANE.

Fighting Redskins From a Balloon.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

A CARD QUARREL.

"Professor Gustave Lemoine will make his great and unparalleled balloon ascension from the Presidio to-morrow morning. All who are interested in the development of modern science are invited to be present.

"The professor is from the Old World. He has been honored by the Emperor of Germany, the late Emperor of the French, and several other European potentates. As a balloonist he ranks supreme. Such a sight as this ascension has never yet been witnessed in the West."

This was the announcement which three frontiersmen read upon a printed bill stuck upon a wall in San Francisco on a summer's morning toward the close of the late seventies.

They read it over and over again, with considerable as-

tonishment, for they had never seen anything like it before.

They had heard of balloons and seen pictures of them in the Eastern papers, but they had never actually seen a balloon itself.

Such a thing had never been brought to 'Frisco or any other point in the Far West at that early period of its development. Prof. Gustave Lemoine, the daring and adventurous French aeronautist, was the first man to think of doing it.

"Sounds pretty good ter me, Buff'ler," said one of the three scouts, stroking his long and matted beard. "I'd like ter see the goldurned contraption."

The speaker was old Nick Wharton, the veteran trapper, and the man whom he addressed was Buffalo Bill, the king of the scouts.

The latter was a man who would have attracted attention instantly in any company.

He stood over six feet tall, and was a man whose graceful figure did not conceal his great strength and athletic build. His face was open and truthful, affording a good index to his nature.

He studied the bill on the wall for a moment, and then replied to the old trapper:

"Yes, we will surely be there. I never saw a balloon yet, and I certainly would like to do so. I wish the professor would take us for a trip with him in it, but I guess that's out of the question."

"Gosh all hemlocks, Cody!" exclaimed Nick Wharton. "Do ye mean ter say ye would ride round in the clouds in a kafoozlin' thing like thet, an' come down kerplunk on the top of a mount'in? Not fer old Nick Wharton, thank'ee! I'll stick ter the airth, until some durned red-skin takes my scalp an' plants me underground."

The old trapper's two companions laughed heartily.

The third man was Wild Bill, the famous scout, whose record as an Indian fighter ranked only second to that of Buffalo Bill himself.

"Well, let's wander along and take in the town," he said. "I haven't been in 'Frisco for two years, and it's a pretty good place to spend money in."

"We certainly have got it to spend, for once in our lives," remarked Buffalo Bill.

The three scouts had made a lucky strike in gold mining in Nevada a few months before, and had just come into San Francisco with several thousand dollars which they meant to spend before they went to work again.

"Where shall we go?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Let's go down to the Gold Dust Saloon," replied Wild Bill. "Something is generally doing down there. It's about the best place in 'Frisco to look for a fight, I reckon."

"You certainly are always on the hunt for trouble, Hickok," laughed the border king. "Time enough for trouble when it troubles you! You needn't go looking for it. But, come along! We'll see what's doing."

The three scouts strode along the street, dismissing the notice of the balloon ascension from their minds for the time being. But they were soon to be reminded of it in a forcible manner.

They walked to the saloon, a notorious resort of the "bad men" of San Francisco in that day, and sat down at a table and ordered some lunch.

Looking around, they saw that the room, which was at

the back of the bar, was well filled with a number of tough-looking characters.

"Plenty of these cusses would be glad enough to cut our throats, if they guessed how much money we have in our belts," remarked Bill Hickok, in an undertone to the border king.

"Hush! You had better not give them any idea of that," said Cody, warningly. "Don't flash your gold. If any of them asks you to play poker, duck out of it. We don't want to get in any more trouble than we can help, and this is the place to find it without much looking round. I know it of old."

Wild Bill nodded his head in assent, and went to work to eat his lunch quietly, without speaking to any of the tough characters in the room; but nevertheless keeping a very close eye on all that went on around him.

The attention of the three scouts was attracted to a table in the center of the room, at which four men were sitting and playing a game of cards.

Three of the players were frontiersmen of the worst and toughest type, but the third was evidently a foreigner, and a man of very striking appearance.

He was a natty little man, very French in appearance, with carefully waxed mustache and the little beard known as an "imperial." He was dressed just exactly as he might have been in Paris. So far from adopting the typical Western outfit, he wore a black cutaway coat, a flowing silk tie, carefully creased trousers, and a silk hat very high in the crown and carefully polished.

His face was open and honest, and looked as if it ordinarily wore a good-humored and cheerful expression. But just at the present moment the look upon it was very much the opposite.

He was scowling savagely at the men with whom he was playing, and as the scouts looked at him he burst out:

"*Sacre!* You cheat me, you *couchons!* I played the winning card, and I shall take what you call the pot!"

With these words, he reached over and took up the pot, which was full of gold pieces and a few nuggets.

Instantly one of the other players sprung to his feet and seized his hand.

"Not so durned fast, you Froggy!" he growled. "Thet ain't the way we play here. You leave the pot alone. I took it with my card."

The Frenchman stared at him in amazement, not unmixed with anger.

"But, monsieur talks foolishly!" he exclaimed. "Here is my card. You must see that it beats yours."

"And here's my trump!" yelled the bully, drawing a big six-shooter from his belt and leveling it within a few inches of the foreigner's nose. "Say another word, and I'll fire! Now, will you give up your claim to the pot?"

"*Mais non*, you scoundrel! I won it, and I demand that I have it. Fire, if you choose and murder me, as you are trying to cheat me."

The Frenchmen folded his arms and looked calmly at the muzzle of the revolver, without a tremor of fear on his face.

By this time the associates of the bully, who were playing with him at the table, had shown a disposition to take a hand in this new game.

They, too, had risen to their feet and drawn their guns.

Things looked ugly for the Frenchman, and he would probably have paid with his life for his boldness in opposing the bullies and cheats, had not help suddenly come to him from an unexpected quarter.

CHAPTER II.

UP IN A BALLOON.

"Drop those guns!"

The three bullies turned their heads at this stern command, coming from behind them, and found that they were covered by the revolvers of Buffalo Bill and his two companions.

They looked into the eyes of the scouts, with a moment's hesitation, but they saw that those who threatened them were not men with whom it was safe to trifle.

If they delayed to obey the order, it would not be repeated. It would be followed by a bullet through the head of each one of them.

The three guns were dropped to the floor, almost in the same second.

"Throw up your hands!"

The men did as they were told by Buffalo Bill.

"Now, march!"

Silently, the three "bad men" turned and walked out of the saloon, casting evil glances behind them at the Frenchman and the plucky scouts who had so unexpectedly championed his cause.

"The pot is undoubtedly yours, sir," said Buffalo Bill, turning to the foreigner and addressing him with his characteristic courtesy. "We were watching the game, and we saw that you played the winning card. Take up the stakes."

As the Frenchman did so, he bowed profoundly to the knight of the plains, and said:

"Monsieur, permit me to offer to you my profound thanks for ze noble and quick assistance you give to me. Prof. Gustave Lemoine will always be your debtor."

"So, you are the famous French balloonist!" Cody exclaimed. "I had an idea that you were the moment I set eyes upon you."

The Frenchman bowed again, his little black eyes twinkling with pleasure.

"*Mais oui*, I am the balloonist," he replied, "but as to the famous balloonist—well, that is another matter."

"And, how was it that you came so far out West into this wild country?" asked Cody.

"I aim to spread the knowledge of ballooning all over the known world," replied the enthusiastic Frenchman, gesticulating freely as he talked. "It is the greatest thing of the future—to conquer the air and master it as man has mastered the sea. I will demonstrate that it can be done. I will show to-morrow how my balloon can sail in any direction I wish. I will guide it at my will."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Buffalo Bill. "I was always under the impression that a balloon had to drift at the mercy of the winds and air currents, like a ship without a tiller."

"It has been so in the past," said the professor, eagerly, "but it shall be so no longer. I, Gustave Lemoine, have fitted a tiller to a balloon that will steer it just as surely as a ship is steered at sea. I have tried it, and I know what it will do.

"I have sailed my balloon in many parts of the world—in Asia, in Africa, in Europe. Now, I have come to sail it in America—in the furthest and wildest part of America."

"Good for you, old hoss!" cried Nick Wharton, smacking his thigh. "I'll be there to see ye do it to-morrow."

"And so will we all," added Buffalo Bill.

The professor bowed his acknowledgments.

* * * * *

On the following day the Presidio was crowded by hundreds of men eager to see the balloon ascent which had been so widely advertised. There were not wanting people who believed that it was merely a "fake," and would not come off; but they were silenced when they saw the huge gas bag that several men were inflating, under the direction of Prof. Lemoine.

Attached to the bag by many ropes was a basket car large enough to accommodate half a dozen people easily.

It was fitted with a broad, fanlike apparatus at one end, which was evidently intended to steer the balloon.

Inside the car, the professor had a considerable supply of food and water, besides guns, ammunition, grappling irons, sand bags full of ballast, and other necessary articles. Evidently, the professor was an experienced man in his line of work, and believed in starting out well prepared.

When all was made ready, and he was about to give the word to let go the ropes and allow the balloon to soar upward to the clouds, he stepped forward to the front of the crowd of men who were watching him, and asked:

"Is there any man here who is willing to come with me?"

There was no response for a moment, and then the question was repeated, and the professor looked straight at Buffalo Bill, who was standing on the outskirts of the crowd, in company with Wild Bill and Nick Wharton.

"You will come with me, will you not, sir?" he pleaded. "You are the brave man who saved my life yesterday. Now, you shall have the glory of seeing the conquest of the air demonstrated."

"How long will you be gone, and where are you going, professor?" asked Buffalo Bill, cautiously.

The Frenchman shrugged his shoulders expressively.

"Who can tell?" he said. "I plan to be gone a week, and to sail to the eastward over the mountains. But something may go wrong—there may be a leak in the gas bag—pouf! we go pop, and come down to the ground too quick. But, I think it is not so. I think I have everything well fixed. Will you come?"

Buffalo Bill looked hard at his companions before replying.

The prospect that the balloon might burst and come hurtling down to the ground was not a very inviting one, but he did not care to let the Frenchman think he was afraid. He was never the man to take a "dare."

"I'll come, professor," he said, suddenly.

"And I'll come with you, too," added Wild Bill.

"You fellers must be goldurned crazy," remonstrated old Nick Wharton, with an outburst of anger. "Ter go sailin' around tied on ter the end of a gas bag—I never heard o' sech nonsense! I won't come with you—thet's a cinch! Old Nick Wharton's got sunthin' better ter do at his time o' life. You can look me up when you come back ter town, ef you ever do. I'll go out on a little trappin' expedition on my own account, an' you can go 'round in your kafoozlin' gas bag. Good-by!"

And the incensed old trapper turned on his heel and strode away from the crowd, not even waiting to see his friends make the ascent.

A few moments later, amid the cheers of the onlookers, the professor gave the word and the grappling iron which had held the balloon to the ground was pulled up.

Instantly the great bag shot upward, bearing Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill and the aëronaut with it.

Up and up they went, until the mighty balloon was a mere speck in the heavens, as seen from the ground; and then it took an easterly direction to head over the mountains, and was soon lost to view.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE HANDS OF THE TEJONS.

Four days after the departure of the balloon there was a strange and thrilling scene in a mountain gorge about forty miles from Frisco.

A group of Tejon Indians, hideous in their war paint, their feathers and their savage ornaments, were gathered round a white man, their prisoner, whom they had bound to the stake.

He was dressed in hunter's garb, but was weaponless. His cruel captors were dancing and whooping in hideous glee around him, brandishing their weapons in his face, and uttering cries of derision at his plight.

"Howl on, ye red varmints, until ye crack the paint on yer ugly mugs!" muttered the prisoner.

He was our old friend Nick Wharton, who had gone on his trapping expedition as soon as the balloon departed, only to fall promptly into the hands of a band of Tejon Indians.

"White man often trap and shoot in Tejon country," laughed one of the redskins, waving a knife within a few inches of Nick Wharton's face. "He boast that red men never catch him. Now we have him, and he pay dear. He shall die, but not quickly."

"You wouldn't have had me, though, if you hadn't caught me asleep over there on the mountain. That's the trouble of going out on sech a trip without a pard. Ef I'd had Buff'ler Bill with me, this wouldn't have happened. I was dead—beat—almost rubbed out from a fight with a grizzly—and I jest had ter take a bit o' nature's patent restorer, you know. You stole up and had me caught before I woke up. Well, you red devils, do your worst!"

"Ugh! White man talk too much!" said the Indian

brave who had previously spoken. "We make him yell soon—we make him cry out for mercy like a squaw."

"No, goldurn you, you won't!" cried Nick Wharton. "You and all your tribe kin——"

He stopped in the middle of the sentence, and strained his eyes eagerly at the distant horizon.

He had seen a sight which made him think he must be dreaming.

Surely it could not be—surely he must be imagining—and yet the speck came nearer and nearer, until at last there could no longer be any possible doubt.

It was the professor's balloon coming toward him at a rapid rate, at the height of about half a mile from the ground.

In it, as he well knew, were his two best friends and comrades, Buffalo Bill and Wild Bill.

As soon as they saw the peril in which he was placed—and probably Buffalo Bill's eagle eye had already seen it—they would hasten to his rescue.

Indeed, they were already heading straight in his direction, the balloon being guided, as the Frenchman had said, quite as well as a ship at sea.

The Indians, meanwhile, had been clamoring to be allowed to torture the prisoner, and only the stern commands of their chief—the man who had spoken—had kept them back. He wanted to think of some new device by which he could inflict more exquisite agony on the white man than anything yet dreamed of. And while he was doing that, he wanted the paleface to suffer the bitter mental torture of suspense.

So taken up were the Indians with their cruel work—their evil thoughts—that they did not notice the little speck coming swiftly toward them through the blue heavens.

Suddenly a tomahawk hurtled over the chief's shoulder, and buried itself in the stake, a few inches only from the head of Nick Wharton.

"They are getting beyond his control—they won't wait," muttered the old trapper to himself. "If that gas bag doesn't come up purty soon, I'll be a gone coon."

The chief turned to his followers, seeing that they were intent on executing the prisoner at once, and ordered them to fetch brushwood and logs with which to burn him at the stake.

They eagerly dispersed on this task, while the chief remained by the side of the bound borderer and continued to taunt him with the agonies he was about to endure.

Nick Wharton made no reply. His eyes were fixed

steadily on the little speck in the sky, which was coming nearer and nearer and growing larger and larger every moment.

"Goldurn it, but I wish there was more wind," he muttered to himself. "It's so light thet they hev ter travel mighty slow. Waal, it begins ter look as ef they will come too late, after all."

Even as he said these words, a stronger gust of wind, blowing through the gorge, fanned his cheeks.

He smiled with satisfaction, and thought that he might still have a chance.

It was a race against time.

Would the strengthening breeze bring the balloon along in time to save him? It would be a close thing, either way, and the man whose life was to be the prize could not tell how the race would end. He could only watch and hope.

A number of the Indians now came up with their arms full of small sticks, dried sagebrush and other fuel.

They piled this around the feet of the captive, while the other braves recommenced their infernal dance around him, whooping and yelling in savage glee as they shrieked out the tortures they meant to inflict upon him before he died.

Nick Wharton's stern, weather-beaten face showed not the slightest trace of emotion. He remained unmoved, and apparently almost unconscious of the savage demonstration.

His eyes were fastened at the dim speck in the western sky, which grew every second larger and larger, like the form of a down-swooping bird.

The hideous preparations were almost complete, the death dance was at its height.

A sinewy savage was kneeling at the foot of the faggot heap, blowing into flame a tiny spark of fire which he held on the end of a stick between his hollowed hands.

The spark was just kindling into a blaze, and the prisoner seemed doomed beyond hope of rescue, when the chief suddenly gave a shriek. This time it was not a shriek of rage or of menace, like those which had been ringing in Nick Wharton's ears. It was a cry of absolute, craven, superstitious fear.

He pointed to the western sky, and the savages, for the first time in their lives, saw a balloon coming down upon them like an immense and threatening bird.

Like their chief, they were completely terrified.

The spark fell, flameless and harmless, from the hands of the savage who was trying to kindle the fire. The

death dance ceased, and the hideous shouts and yells of the other braves died away instantly.

Every eye was turned in the direction indicated by the pointing hand of the chief. Abject terror and dismay at once took possession of all, except the captive at the stake.

The speck above the mountains had enlarged to a symmetrical sphere, pear shaped and beautiful, which momentarily swelled in its proportions as it swept onward and downward with inconceivable rapidity under the impulse of the strong wind which had sprung up.

To the civilized eye, it was only a balloon, but to the superstitious redskins it was the embodied Wind Spirit of the Great Manitou. He was angry with them, they thought, and he had sent his Wind Spirit to release their captive and to punish them.

The Indians were affected in different ways, but nearly all of them were too much terrified with superstitious terror to think either of fight or of flight.

They huddled together in terrified groups, moaning and shivering as if with the ague.

All eyes were directed toward the swiftly approaching monster, now so near that the three men seated in the car could be distinctly seen.

As the mighty sphere came surging near the ground, the Frenchman threw out the grappling anchor, which took firm hold of the bushes. While the balloon flaunted and eddied to and fro in the air overhead, with a great, crackling sound, the basket came scraping along the ground and brought right up in the very center of the horde of frightened Indians.

To lean over the edge of the car, or basket, and to sever the cords that bound Nick Wharton, was the work of a moment for Buffalo Bill.

"Jump in, Nick," he said. "Don't waste any time, for they may get over their scare pretty soon."

Nick did not lose a moment in obeying the injunction. He clambered into the basket car, and right glad he was to find himself there, in spite of all the hard things he had said about balloons.

No sooner had he got aboard than the anchor tore from its fastenings, the vast bulk of the balloon shook, and the car began to leave the ground.

At this instant a brawny Indian sprang to his feet and grasped at the bottom of the basket with one hand, while with the other he reached up and tried to strike Buffalo Bill with his hatchet.

His added weight was enough to retard the ascent of the balloon. He held on with grim tenacity, though

pulled violently hither and thither over the rough ground until the moccasins were torn completely from his feet.

The professor rose to the occasion at once.

Swiftly picking up a bag of sand ballast, he cast it over the side of the car, which immediately began to rise slowly a few feet from the ground.

The Indian, nearly exhausted, was just about to release his hold, when Buffalo Bill let down the grappler and caught it tightly in his wampum waist belt.

Just then the balloon, relieved of many pounds of ballast by the professor, rose, dragging the savage with it.

One of the redskins grasped his comrade round the waist, and he again, in turn, was seized by a third.

Combining their weight, the three men strove to retard the tugging monster from leaving the ground.

The Frenchman and Wild Bill, working with frantic speed, heaved out bag after bag of the sand ballast.

"Let her go, professor!" shouted Buffalo Bill.

The balloon, lightened by the loss of the ballast, instantly shot upward, dragging the three redskins with it.

CHAPTER IV.

TOWING REDSKINS TO THE CLOUDS.

Relieved of many pounds of ballast, the balloon rose in the air like a great bird.

The savages who had hold of one another had not the sense to let go at once while there was still time.

Panic-stricken, their one idea was to cling as tightly as they knew how.

When they realized the folly of this course, the balloon was fully fifty feet above the earth, and, if they dropped, they would be smashed to pieces.

"Heave out more sand!" shouted the Frenchman.

Under the influence of the excitement of the moment, Cody seized a huge bag weighing fully two hundred pounds and tossed it over as if it were merely a child's ball that he did not feel the weight of.

Nick Wharton, leaning over the edge of the car, noticed with acute pleasure that the heavy bag fell flat on the skull of the chief of the Tejons, who had taunted him so cruelly.

He was looking up at the balloon, and was so dazed by the strangeness of the things that were happening, that he neglected to dodge out of the way in time.

The bag flattened him out, breaking his neck and reducing his body almost to a pulp, which was not sur-

prising, as the missile fell from a height of several hundred feet.

The three redskins were still being carried upward, and their frantic shrieks of terror resounded even more loudly than the yells with which they had sought to frighten old Nick Wharton when he was bound to the stake.

"By hookey, professor!" exclaimed the trapper, looking down; "they're still dangling to one another, like sassafras on a string."

"You do not need to worry about that, *mon ami*," was the calm reply of the Frenchman. "They will soon drop."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when, with a terrible yell, the lowermost savage loosened his grip and plunged head downward.

Soon the second followed his example, giving an unearthly shriek as he went tumbling over and over through space.

Only the man held by the grapnel remained, but he, too, went presently, his wampum belt breaking in halves under his weight.

The balloon shot upward with frightful rapidity as soon as it was relieved of the weight of the Indians.

Slowly the scene below grew wider and more chess-board-like and miniature in its character.

Streams became silver threads of gossamer fineness, vast forests were irregular plots that looked as if they might have been covered with the palm of the hand, and broad lakes were little wells of water.

It was a sublime, never-to-be-forgotten spectacle. Old Nick Wharton had never seen its like before, but it was, of course, already familiar to the other two scouts, who had been with the balloon for several days.

The old trapper gazed down over the edge of the car on the tremendous landscape spread out before him, and he thought that he would never tire of looking down.

Finally, the voice of the aeronaut aroused him.

"Come, my friend," he said, "we have mounted high, and it is growing colder every minute. Do you not feel it so? Take some of these blankets. Your friends are already wrapped up."

Nick Wharton, aroused from the semi-trance into which the novelty and magnificence of the spectacle had thrown him, now keenly felt the change in the temperature. It was colder than in the coldest winter he had known.

There were a number of blankets flung down in one corner of the car, and Nick gladly rolled himself up in a

couple of them. He saw that his comrades had done likewise.

"How did you manage ter hit the location whar them durned redskins was goin' ter frizzle me?" he asked Buffalo Bill, as they reclined side by side on the bottom of the car.

"By the telescope," replied the border king. "The professor has a very powerful one here, and I take a look around the landscape pretty often with it.

"We were not heading quite in your direction, but, when we got near enough for me to distinguish that a man was tied to the stake with a lot of redskins round him, we changed our course at once and headed to save him.

"Luckily, the professor can steer the craft. If it were an ordinary balloon, we would be simply at the mercy of the winds, and would have to drift where they carried us. In that case, we could not have got near enough to rescue you in time, though we could have descended and had a fight with the redskins—too late."

"Have you got over your prejudice against balloons yet, Nick?" asked Wild Bill, with a quiet chuckle.

"You bet I have!" Wharton replied, with great energy. "Balloons sure air the best things ever made. Gosh all rattlers, professor, but I want ter thank you frum the very bottom of my heart!"

The old trapper seized the hand of the Frenchman, and wrung it so heartily that the latter grimaced with pain.

"You're a brick!" Wharton went on. "If ever you're in a tight spot with Injuns, or panthers, or grizzlies, or any other durned, old thing, and Nick Wharton can take you out of it, you kin bet thet he'll be ready ter lose his hide in doin' it."

The Frenchman bowed his thanks and smiled, but he had no time for paying compliments at that moment. The situation of the balloon demanded his attention.

"It grows colder," he said. "We must almost have reached that current I was trying to hit. Yes," he added, consulting the thermometer and barometer in the car. "We are more than a mile above the top of the mountains."

"No wonder it is cold," said Buffalo Bill.

"I came up as far as this because I wanted to strike a strong, easterly current. By taking advantage of it, we can hit the coast very soon. We could go clear across to China on this current if we liked."

"Wouldn't that be a fine trip?" remarked Wild Bill, with a light-hearted laugh.

The Frenchman looked at him sharply, and chuckled in a high-pitched, eerie manner.

"Shall we go?" he answered. "I am quite willing."

The other men stared at him in amazement.

Buffalo Bill saw—what he had not previously suspected—that there was a streak of lunacy in the man's character, probably caused by his lonely journeys through the vast spaces of the air.

As he thought this, the look of madness passed out of the professor's eyes, and he became the keen, alert man of science again.

"Stand by the throttle valve, while I take the helm," he cried to Cody.

Buffalo Bill, who had learned a great deal about the balloon during the short time he had been voyaging in it, at once seized the cord indicated.

Lemoine grasped a crank connected with the fanlike windmill which was attached outside the car, and began to turn it with great rapidity toward the right.

The fans swiftly revolved, making a loud, whirring noise as they did so, and the air ship seemed to feel their influence.

Presently there was a snapping of cloth and cords. The mighty air bag trembled violently, and then plunged off violently in a slantwise direction with such force as nearly to upset the car.

"Cling tight!" yelled the professor, suiting the action to the word.

The scouts did so, and the car almost immediately righted itself. The balloonists were conscious of being carried through the atmosphere at a terrific speed.

The delighted professor danced on the bottom of the car, and swore a number of strange, French oaths to give vent to his pleasure at the success of his clever maneuver.

"We have struck the very center of the current," he said, when he had calmed down somewhat. "Throw out that smallest bag at your feet, Cody. We must get up well into it."

He gave the crank a whirl, and shouted with a sort of demoniac glee:

"Ha! This is the way I felt when I crossed the Atlantic from Havre to Rio de Janeiro. Would you like to go to China, did you say? Well, I will take you there. This current will carry us easily."

"No, we don't want to go," said Cody, wisely humoring his madness. "China is too far away from home, and there are as many Chinamen as we want to see right here in America."

The Frenchman laughed, and at once forgot all about China and rattled off about a lot more mythical adventures of his own.

"This is what I experienced when I explored the mysteries of the Antarctic Ocean," he said. "I crossed the icy barrier to the warm sea beyond, where the waters become so hot that all the whales are boiled as red as lobsters. At last the sea goes plunging down into the fiery crater at the pole, and is lost in the bowels of the earth."

So he rattled on, while the scouts looked at one another meaningly, and realized that he was a monomaniac on at least one subject—the things he supposed he had seen and done in his balloon.

It was not entirely comfortable to be swinging away up there in space, a mile or more above the highest of the mountain peaks, with a wild-mannered lunatic; but they soon saw that he was quite harmless and thoroughly well able to take care of his air ship.

Even in his wildest ecstasies, he kept an eye on his instruments and on the direction of the clouds and wind drifts. And the moment anything needed to be done, he did it with the quickness and accuracy born of long experience and perfect knowledge of his science.

Altogether, Buffalo Bill and his friends felt that Gustave Lemoine was one of the queerest characters they had ever met.

CHAPTER V.

A COLLISION WITH A MOUNTAIN.

At last, having fixed everything properly on the balloon and talked about his mythical adventures until he was hoarse, the professor reclined in one corner of the car, became silent, and brooded over his own thoughts.

The three scouts lay down on the other side of the car and talked together about all that had happened since last they saw one another.

"We have had no adventures worth speaking about," said Buffalo Bill. "Just cruised up and down since we left San Francisco. The professor certainly is a wonder for hitting the air currents and using his steering apparatus so that he can go just where he wants to go. I don't know much about ballooning, but I should guess he's got all the other men in the business beaten a mile."

Lemoine, at the other end of the car, overheard this, and smiled with gratified vanity.

Nick Wharton told how he had gone on his trapping

expedition, and been captured and tied to the stake by the Tejons.

"That tribe is always giving trouble," said Buffalo Bill. "They pretend to be friendly, but when they can get a white man alone—a hunter or a prospector—they will torture him to death as soon as look at him, just as they were going to do with you."

"They ought to be taught a thundering, good lesson," remarked Wild Bill.

"Well, we'll let the authorities know about what happened to old Nick, and what would have happened if we hadn't turned up just in time to save him," said Buffalo Bill. "It is possible that they will do something to punish them, but I doubt it. The government is petting the Indians too much just now, and it won't listen to a word against its red favorites."

"Goldurn all redskins and all Injun agents, say I!" growled Nick Wharton. "One is as bad as t'other."

"There is one thing about this balloon that bothers me, professor," said Cody, rolling over on his side and talking to Lemoine.

"And what is that, my friend?"

"The supply of gas is running short. You cannot cruise forever on one filling of the bag. You cannot cruise for many days, in fact. We have been up now for some time, and it seems to me that the bag is getting flabby. The gas is leaking out fast, and soon we will have to descend. What will you do then. You will probably lose the balloon."

"You have learned a good deal about the business in a short time, my friend, but you have not yet learned it all," replied the Frenchman. "I did not come out on this trip without carefully thinking of all that and providing for it."

"I learned that there is a reservoir—a geyser—call it what you will—of natural gas in a cave on the other side of the mountains. I had a map of its location carefully made for me. It will not be difficult to find the place."

"I have the pipes here in the car with which I fill the bag. They can be fixed easily, and the natural gas will be as good as the artificial kind for the balloon."

Buffalo Bill could not help admiring the thoughtfulness and resource with which the aëronaut had provided for all contingencies. He might be a madman, but there certainly was a great deal of method in his madness.

"What is the exact location of this cave where the natural gas is found?" he asked.

The Frenchman took the chart of the position out of his pocket and showed it to him.

"Why, that is in the very heart of the Tejon country," exclaimed the king of the scouts. "It will be a particularly dangerous place to descend. I don't know that cave, but I see by the chart that it is not more than four miles from their chief village. Those Indians from whom we rescued Nick Wharton were Tejons, and, if the news has had time to get back to the village, the braves there will all be crazy to take our scalps."

"Let them try," said the aëronaut, calmly. "A man in a balloon has the men below him at his mercy. They could do nothing against us."

"All very well, if we are sailing at the time," remarked the border king. "But if a hundred of their warriors should happen to catch us when we had descended, and were not ready to go up again, they would make us look pretty sick, I fancy."

"Well, we must trust to luck," said Lemoine. "It has never failed me yet. Now, when I crossed the icy barriers of the Arctic Sea in the year——"

But a snore from Buffalo Bill prevented the recounting of any more of these imaginary reminiscences.

The border king had got very tired of that subject, and, as soon as Lemoine opened up on it, he pretended to be asleep.

The professor looked round at the other two scouts, but they also took good care to appear to be in the arms of Morpheus; so, with a sigh, he gave up the idea of telling his story, and resigned himself to his own thoughts.

It was now night time, and the stars over his head appeared unusually bright, for the balloon was sailing in the rarefied air above the clouds.

Lemoine sat on watch for some hours, for they were in a mountainous country. The balloon had sunk somewhat, and he had to keep a good lookout that they did not "run aground" by striking some forest-clad peak and getting tangled up in the trees. That would probably mean the destruction of the whole party, and it could only be avoided, at the critical moment, by throwing overboard some more ballast, so that the balloon would suddenly shoot up into the air.

After watching for about two hours, the professor became worried.

Heavy banks of clouds obscured the face of the sky, and he could hardly see fifty yards ahead of him.

The balloon was driving along at a great rate in a powerful air current, and Lemoine knew full well that

he would have no time to reverse the steering geer or throw out ballast so that the balloon would shoot upward, in case he met with an obstruction in his path.

As he was thinking over these things, the very event that he dreaded came to pass.

Through the clouds he saw dimly the forms of several trees outlined against the dark slope of a vast mountain.

They were right in front of him, and he knew that in a few seconds he and his friends would crash among them, and the balloon would in all probability be rent in fragments.

"Up!" he shrieked, in a frantic voice. "Up! We are doomed!"

The three scouts were accustomed to sleeping lightly, like all men who habitually held their lives in their hands.

They sprang to their feet on the instant, and, with the instinct of experienced frontiersmen, their hands went naturally to the butts of their revolvers.

Then, almost in the same second, they remembered that they were up in a balloon, and had no reason to expect a fight with the redskin foes with whose wiles they were so familiar.

Lemoine yelled frantically, but, almost before the screech had escaped from his lips, there was a sickening thud.

The car struck the ground violently, and the vast bulk of the balloon was entangled among the branches of the trees that crested the peak of the mountain.

The four men were hurled violently to the ground.

Before he fell, Lemoine, with the instinct of the born balloonist, hurled the grappling anchor overboard.

It struck in the lower branches of a huge tree, and brought the great bag up with a round turn.

The balloon was securely anchored.

CHAPTER VI.

ATTACKED BY NIGHT.

The four men, hurled violently to the ground, remained for some few minutes unconscious.

Then Lemoine crawled to his feet, groped about in the darkness, and said:

"Is this you, Cody?"

"Yes," replied the border king, rising feebly from the ground, for he had been badly stunned. "Are you much hurt, Lemoine?"

"No," said the Frenchman.

The border king looked around and saw the figures of

Wild Bill and Nick Wharton lying upon the ground, a few yards away.

He reached for the flask of brandy and water which he was carrying at his belt, and applied it to the lips of Wild Bill.

The scout opened his eyes, and feebly announced that he was all right.

"Any bones broken, old pard?" asked Cody.

"No, I don't feel any."

The two friends turned their attention to Nick Wharton.

He had sustained a bad blow on the head, which had knocked him out completely; but he, too, soon revived.

"The balloon is safe, thank goodness!" Lemoine announced, coming up to the scouts.

They tested the anchor, and found that it had caught fast, and could not be torn away by anything less than a violent storm.

"The best thing we can do is to stay here for the night," said the aeronaut. "In the morning we can take our direction and get over the top of the mountains without any difficulty. I don't know that I could do it on this dark night. It would be very dangerous. We have had such a narrow escape that we ought not to tempt fortune any more. What do you say, Cody?"

"I fully agree with you," replied the border king. "Luckily we have enough gas in the bag to carry us to the cave you spoke of on the other side of the ridge, where the natural gas is found."

"Yes, we have enough for that, though the supply is running low."

"Well, we must set a watch for the rest of the night," remarked the king of the scouts. "We are now well in the Tejon country, and some of their scouts or war parties may be upon the prowl."

"It is a dark night, but the balloon is a pretty big object, and, if they see it, they will be sure to come up and investigate."

The others agreed, and Cody and Wild Bill kept the first watch.

They were to awaken the others a couple of hours before the dawn, so that they themselves might have a little sleep.

For an hour or more, nothing passed to arouse the suspicion of the watchful sentinels.

Then Cody held up his hand, and made a gesture warning Wild Bill to keep perfect silence and be ready to act on the moment's notice.

That gesture was hardly needed, for Hickok had heard the same snapping of a twig which had caught the acute ear of the king of the scouts.

Silently the two men waited, their hands tightly grasping their revolvers.

Dimly, through the trees, they saw the figures of four Indians approaching. They could tell them by their feather headdresses, which showed plainly outlined against the faint light of the stars.

The blade of a tomahawk glinted over the sleeping figure of Lemoine, who was sleeping nearest to the stealthy attackers of the camp.

Before it could descend, Buffalo Bill's revolver cracked, and the bullet sped true to its mark.

With a low groan, the redskin sank in his tracks.

The bullet had penetrated his brain, and he died on the instant.

The other savages gave a whoop of amazement and rage when they saw the fall of their comrade.

They had expected to surprise the camp, and take a few scalps without the slightest trouble; but they were now to discover and rue their mistake.

Buffalo Bill promptly fired again, and in the same instant Wild Bill's revolver belched forth a deadly missile.

Three of the four redskins had fallen, and the fourth took to his heels and fled through the trees and thick underbrush in deadly terror.

"After him, pard!" shouted Buffalo Bill. "We don't want him to get away, or he may bring some more of these sneaking Tejons upon us."

The three scouts dashed through the wood, but the redskin had got a good start, and in the darkness of the night they could not well follow the direction he had taken.

Soon they returned, giving up the pursuit in disgust.

Their first duty was to guard the camp, and they did not, therefore, want to stray far away from it.

Returning, they found that Nick Wharton and Lemoine had been awakened by the sound of the shots and were standing on guard, revolvers in hand.

The four men watched together, but no further attack was made that night, and in the morning, soon after dawn, they climbed into the balloon, cast loose the grappling anchor, and resumed their journey toward the cave where the natural gas was to be found.

CHAPTER VII.

INTERRUPTING A REDSKIN MEAL.

It was a fine morning, bright and sunny, and a vast expanse of landscape could be distinctly seen.

The three scouts and their eccentric host kept a bright lookout for Indians, for they were now in the very heart of the Tejon country.

Mile after mile was passed, and at last they were clear over the summits of the mountain chain, and sailing round on the other side toward the cavern where they were to replenish their gas supply.

"Strange we haven't seen more of the redskins; they ought to be pretty thick hereabouts," said Wild Bill, as he took the glass from the professor and glanced around the horizon.

"We shall see them quite soon enough for our health when we get to the cave, perhaps," said Buffalo Bill.

"See, we must skirt down along the ridge," the excitable, little Frenchman suddenly cried. "The cave that we seek is many miles lower down."

"Send her along, professor!" shouted Nick Wharton. "You can steer the goldurned contraption jest as I would ride a broncho."

Prof. Lemoine seized the crank of the great fan wheel and began to whirl it round at a great rate. He occupied himself in this way for a considerable time, while Nick gazed over the side at the varied and wonderful panorama beneath.

As they passed slowly over the mountains, the bold and jagged spur of the main range, which formed here a huge sugar-loaf cone, the air current in which they sailed so long suddenly failed, leaving them absolutely becalmed in mid air; while below them, and between them and the earth, fleecy clouds went sailing on, looking like carded wool.

"This is a most remarkable phenomenon to occur at this brief distance from the earth," said the professor, consulting the barometer and other scientific instruments. "We are scarcely half a mile high and utterly becalmed, while the clouds beneath us are in constant motion."

"Yes, and here is an Injun encampment right at our feet," said Nick Wharton. They all looked over, and, through a break in the cloudy floor, saw a dozen or more Indians gathered together at the foot of the mountain, and at such a short distance that their voices could be distinctly heard.

A single wigwam, or temporary lodge, of bark and skins, stood a little distance apart.

The Indians appeared to be busily engaged in lighting a fire, preparatory to making a pot boil, which was suspended on a cross piece, supported by two upright cross sticks over a heap of fagots, before which two or three of the savages knelt, patiently striking their flints and steel, while their comrades lounged about, looking lazily on.

"Now," said the professor, rubbing his hands and smiling, "here is a capital chance to improve upon the superstitious loafers' regard for my simple balloon. How much water did we lay in with our provisions, Wild Bill?"

"Two kegs and a barrel," replied Wild Bill.

"Good enough!" said the other, stooping and raising a small trapdoor which opened upon a hole about twelve inches square in the bottom of the car. "Now, sling that water barrel over here, so that the spigot will be directly over the center of this hole. I am going to see if we can't puzzle those fellows a little before they succeed in making that pot boil."

In the meantime, the Indians below, utterly oblivious of enemies or mischief makers in their vicinity, kept up their efforts to light their fire.

At length one of them succeeded in obtaining the much-desired spark.

This done, he applied it to the dead leaves underneath the heap, and all gave a grunt of satisfaction as they burst into flame.

But their joy was of brief duration.

Suddenly a stream of water, about half as thick as a man's wrist, and descending from Heaven alone knows where, came pouring down, extinguishing the blaze, and scattering the dry sticks in every direction in the twinkling of an eye.

The savages, in utter amazement, looked first at each other and then aloft; but the stream of water having ceased, and the fleecy clouds having drifted between them and the balloon, of course they were at a loss to account for the remarkable occurrence.

They made up for their lack of knowledge by abusing each other soundly, and went to work building another fire in a dry spot.

Again the flint and steel were brought into requisition, and soon a cheery blaze began to mount and crawl, and crackle among the leaves and twigs under the stew pot.

At this they began to rub their hollow stomachs in anticipation of a hearty meal, when down came the miniature waterspout again, scattering fire and fagots right and left.

The Indians set up a howl of consternation, and the utmost hubbub prevailed, as they could see nothing overhead but the thin, fleecy clouds whose light vapors, pierced and silvered through and through by the sunlight, precluded the possibility of their holding even a pint of rain water.

And now the chief, with his young squaw at his side, appeared at the door of the wigwam, and began to snort and swear at a great rate, from which it would have been evident, even to one who was unfamiliar with the language, that he wanted his dinner very badly, and was heartily tired of waiting for it.

His followers replied by a jargon of sounds, accompanied by a multitude of explanatory gesticulations, and he strode up to the remains of the fire around which they were gathered, still wrangling with each other like so many parrots in a cage.

He had barely pushed his way among them, his face disfigured with rage, however, before a perfect deluge of water—for the bottom of the water cask had at this moment fallen out—came splashing down, thoroughly spoiling their war paint.

They shivered and yelled, but before they could entirely recover their senses, a grapnel—defly lowered down by a cord from above—descended, caught the stew pot by one of its handles, and jerked the contents of water, broken meat and wild turnips, over the entire party, and then, after setting the stew pot upside down on the head of their astonished chieftain, disappeared into the air before anyone could see it.

The Indians now came to the conclusion that they were bewitched, and the utmost confusion prevailed for some moments.

The young squaw, with her baby strapped upon her back, came out of the wigwam, to join the general confusion and bewail the loss of her soup, and the whole gang, who were nearly all of them on the verge of starvation, set up a most hideous howl. They seemed incapable of any useful action.

At length, however, their leader, who was the first to recover his presence of mind, prevailed upon them to renew their attempt at firemaking, under the spreading branches of a gigantic oak tree, and retired with his squaw to the interior of the wigwam, dolefully rubbing the place where his dinner should have been, and looking as if he could have cheerfully devoured the side of a buffalo without turning a hair.

Everything now, for some time, continued to progress

satisfactorily, unmarred by mysterious apparitions of any kind.

A new fire was started, this time with success, and the appetizing contents of the stew pot began to simmer.

The resulting odor caused the expectant redskins to lick their chops.

The big chief, on reaching the interior of his lodge, threw himself upon a heap of deerskins and lighted a pipe, while his good-looking better half sat at his side, playing with her papoose and prattling to her lord so merrily as to frequently cause a grim smile to overspread his harsh and warlike features.

Suddenly, however, he rose into a sitting posture, and curiously eyed the birchen canopy over his head, for it was moving and swaying to and fro in a surprising and unaccountable manner.

His squaw also noticed it, and sprang to her feet in alarm.

The wigwam was not only shaking from its apex to the ground, but it was actually being carried bodily up into the air.

The chief leaped upon his feet and gave vent to a most appalling yell. Then he clutched his rifle. His followers about the fire answered his cry of consternation with terror in their harsh voices.

They turned their attention from the fire to their mystified leader, just in time to see him left roofless, while the wigwam, impelled by some mysterious power from above, slowly soared into the air, until it hung on a level with the highest tree tops.

At last it caught on the top of a lofty peaked cedar, where it hung, looking like a monstrous nightcap on the head of a giant.

The savages fairly shrieked with amazement.

Suddenly a puff of wind parted the clouds. The bright sun shone out and revealed to the yelling redskins the weird figure of the professor.

He was peering over the side of the car of the balloon, and as his gaze met that of the Indians, he shook his fist at them in cleverly assumed wrath.

By his side were Buffalo Bill and Nick Wharton.

CHAPTER VIII.

CLAWING A BEAR.

Before the Indians could do anything to get the vengeance they thought was their due, the balloon shot up far above them, under the influence of the ballast hastily thrown out by Wild Bill, under the professor's direction.

"We sartinly did get the best o' them goldurned var-mints," cried old Nick Wharton, in high glee, as he watched the redskins, now mere dots on the landscape below.

"And so we always will," said the professor, triumphantly. "I tell you, there is no better way of fighting anybody, man or beast, than from a balloon.

"I have done it over and over again. Why, when I penetrated the mystic circle of the Antarctic over the vast fields of ice that hedge in the South Pole, what do you think I found? Nothing else but a tribe of the most terrible and bloodthirsty savages you ever encountered.

"They had two heads, and carried one of them under their arm. But from the balloon I could safely defy their frightful ferocity——"

"Look here, professor," cried Buffalo Bill, anxious to stop the harmless monomaniac before he became too excited in recounting his mythical adventures, "had we not better mount a little higher? We are getting pretty close to the top ridges of the mountains, and if we aren't pretty careful we may get tangled up in the trees if the current shifts."

Lemoine nodded his head, and threw out another bag of the sand ballast.

"Ah!" cried the professor, as they rapidly mounted into the atmosphere, leaving peak after peak below them. "There is plenty of life and buoyancy in the old bag yet. She is good as new."

"I say," said Nick Wharton, whose matter-of-fact ideas seldom arose above earthly considerations, "better be on the lookout for game, pards! Remember, we are completely out of fresh meat."

The professor elevated his nose rather contemptuously, and began to sweep the horizon with his telescope, when suddenly Wild Bill cried out in considerable excitement:

"Look, there's a big bear over there!"

"So there is," said Buffalo Bill, getting the grappling iron ready, as he saw the animal—an enormous grizzly—standing upon a ridge below them, curiously watching their approach.

"What are you going to do?" asked the professor, somewhat irritably. "We have work instead of play before us; and you know we can't carry a bear round with us."

"But we may kill him, and take a good slice of him on board," said Buffalo Bill, casting his grapnel with such skill that it at once took hold of the bear's left ear, jerking him upon his hams as the balloon swept on.

The bear began to roar as he felt the sharp prongs of the grapnel.

Buffalo Bill, leaning over the side of the car, quickly emptied the contents of his revolver into the great animal, but with apparently no other effect than to increase his fury.

"We'll have to cast anchor in a tree, and then you can lower me to the ground, where I can get a better shot at the beast," said Buffalo Bill.

The professor acceded to this plan rather reluctantly. He muttered between his teeth, rather unintelligibly, about "some folks thinking of their stomachs before their work."

However, despite his evident aversion to Cody's plan, it was not long before the balloon was anchored to a stunted pine.

Buffalo Bill, with the assistance of Wild Bill and Nick Wharton, hastily fastened a line to his shoulders, having first reloaded his revolver.

"Now, let me down easy," he said, as he clambered over the edge of the car, "and be ready to jerk me up out of reach, if you see it growing a little hot down there."

The car was swinging in the air about twenty-five feet from the ground, and the border king was speedily lowered down.

The bear, in the meantime, had been pawing away at his left ear, in a vain attempt to detach himself from the grapnel, but no sooner did he see the hunter within his reach than he tore himself free, and rushed upon him with a furious roar.

Buffalo Bill greeted him with a pistol ball in the throat, but the next instant his friends swung him free of the ground, and over the bear's head, which received another bullet just behind the ear, before he could wheel his cumbersome form to meet this new assault.

Again Cody hopped lightly over, and another ball was buried in his shaggy side. These tactics were repeated so often that the bear seemed to tire of his previous efforts at defense and merely reared himself on his haunches and struck out with his formidable claws.

But Buffalo Bill's pistol was, by this time, empty again, so he returned it to his belt, and, unsheathing his long hunting knife, prepared himself for what he felt would be a desperate battle.

"Now, jump me gently over his head," he called out to his companions, "and be wide awake, or you may land me in an ugly fix."

Almost as soon as he had spoken, he found himself

lifted from his feet, and the next instant he landed upon the ground just behind the bear.

The great creature narrowly missed pawing him as he swung over its head.

As it was, the bear turned too late.

With a terrific stab, Cody buried his knife to the hilt between his terrible opponent's shoulders.

Again he drove it home, following up his advantage.

At each repeated stroke Wild Bill and Nick pulled on the line and lifted their brave leader out of harm's way.

The contest was too uneven to last long, and at length the shaggy monster, bleeding from a dozen wounds, rolled over and expired.

"His skin is so full of holes that you could use it for a liver pad," said Nick Wharton, at once beginning to carve his way into the great carcass.

"Just have a little patience, mates, and I'll have as fine a quarter of bear meat as you'd wish to see."

In a short time they were back in the car together, with a splendid piece of fat flesh, from which Wild Bill carved two steaks for breakfast.

This meal dispatched, the grapnel was loosed from the pine to which it had been attached, and the balloon, bearing the little party, was once more sweeping through the air before a spanking breeze.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BALLOONISTS HUNT BUFFALOES.

"That was pretty good sport," remarked Wild Bill, as the aeronaut sped onward. "I wish we could have some more like it. It's almost as good as fighting redskins from the air."

"There is plenty of game on the plains," Cody observed. "I guess we shall have all the sport and adventure we want before we are through with this contract. We have done pretty well up to date. This balloon is a better mount than any broncho I ever busted."

"Goldurn all hemlock, but if I had known thet balloonin' was sech good fun I'd hev done it all my life," exclaimed old Nick.

"Lend me the glass, professor," said the border king.

Lemoine handed it to him.

Cody looked carefully around the horizon, and then he put down the glass, and said:

"It is as I thought. I fancied I could see them with the naked eye, and the glass tells me that I was right."

"What's the matter?" asked Wild Bill.

"Buffalo," said the border king, briefly.

"A large herd?"

"Yes."

"Then, let us head for it."

"Good," said the professor.

He worked his steering apparatus, and headed the balloon in the direction which Buffalo Bill pointed out.

Soon the vast gas bag drew near the herd.

The buffalo were feeding in immense numbers.

The leader of the herd, an animal of extraordinary size, seemingly as big as at least two ordinary cattle, raised his head from feeding as the balloon met his vision and snuffed the air suspiciously.

But, after a brief scrutiny of what, to him, must have been a most extraordinary apparition, he went back to his feeding.

He had never seen a balloon before, and apprehended no danger from it.

Reassured by his indifference, the rest of the herd ceased to notice the balloon, and it was soon rushing over their heads at a height of some twenty or thirty feet.

As the car swung directly above the backs of the ruminating animals, a shot from Cody's rifle brought down a fine young bull calf.

As his death bellow sounded, the entire herd raised their heads with angry roars of defiance. But, as Wild Bill and Nick Wharton followed the example of their leader, and with equal success, the attitude of the herd changed.

They wheeled in terror at these new enemies, who fought them from the air, and soon the whole herd was tearing, in a wild stampede, over the prairie.

The ground trembled as the terrific rush progressed, and the humps of the great animals rose and fell as they ran, till, to those in the balloon, they looked like the billows of an angry sea.

Cody, who had foreseen the stampede as the result of his shot, had laid down his rifle and thrown his lariat at the great leader of the herd.

Many buffaloes as he had seen in the course of his adventurous life, the scout had never before set eyes on such a splendid specimen of his kind, and he was ambitious to catch him with the cowboy's weapon—the rope.

He only succeeded, however, in leashing the hind leg of a fine, young cow, who was easily dispatched by a bullet from Wild Bill's rifle.

He had to cut loose his lariat, however, and this was a serious loss to Cody.

On swept the vast herd, with loud thunder of hoofs, and enveloped in a cloud of dust through which, at times, it was hard to see them.

They had now gone about three miles. The ground they were traveling over was broken and uneven.

This hampered the speed of the herd and Cody, who had borrowed Wild Bill's lariat, made a second trial at roping the giant leader of the herd.

The rawhide loop whirled out over the galloping beasts and settled, fair and square, about the shoulders of their great leader.

The monster let out a bellow of rage, that sounded loud even above the thunder of the stampeding hoofs.

He shook his great, shaggy head in a wild attempt to free himself.

The rope of green rawhide held true, however, but those in the balloon now found themselves in what looked as if it might turn out a rather serious situation.

The bull, finding he could not free himself from Cody's noose by his original tactics, placed his head between his legs and rushed on with the rest of the herd, towing the balloon with him as if it were a boy's kite.

Almost at the instant that Buffalo Bill had made his lucky, or, as it now seemed likely to prove, unlucky, throw, the professor, urged by the excitement of the moment, threw out the grapnel.

By some strange chance it caught securely in the shaggy mane of an old cow, who promptly followed her leader when she realized her predicament. So Buffalo Bill and his companions now found themselves tearing through the air at the best speed a team of terrified bison could make.

The car swung wildly from side to side as they rushed through the air. It was like being at sea in a small boat on a rough day.

Cody clung on for dear life; and the professor and the others followed his example.

Their position may seem ludicrous, but at times the bottom of the car scraped the backs of the herd, and at these moments they realized very clearly that to be thrown out of the wildly swinging basket meant a terrible death beneath the feet of the maddened herd.

"Don't lose your grip, or we're goners!" cried Buffalo Bill to the white-faced professor. "This is the very worst I ever saw, and no mistake."

"It is a most remarkable experience in natural history, Bill," replied the professor, who, despite their perilous position, retained his philosophy.

The motion of the car had thrown him to the floor of it.

The small stove, which fortunately was not lighted at the time of their adventure, lay on his chest, and a pile of ropes and blankets had landed on his face, almost smothering the unfortunate scientist.

"If this gait keeps up, we're goners," said Cody, between his teeth.

"If we only could strike a gate, I'd ask the man who owned it to please shut it," grumbled the professor, from under the blankets.

"Well, you'll l'arn more natural history here in a month than you will in France in ten years," was Nick Wharton's unsympathetic comment.

"Hullo, there, what's that out yonder?" exclaimed Wild Bill, suddenly. The plainsman had been scrutinizing the country as well as he was able, in the forlorn hope of seeing some chance of escape from their quandary.

"Gosh my suspenders, ef it ain't a band of Injuns in huntin' dress," cried Nick Wharton, who had followed his companion's gaze,

"That's good!" chimed in Cody. "That means that they are probably friendly. Maybe they'll get us out of our predicament."

The Indians whom Wild Bill had indicated were by this time in full view of the balloon party.

There were about twenty of them in the band, and, as Nick had suggested, they were on an expedition after buffalo. They were, of course, delighted at the sight of the herd of fat bison bearing down upon them.

By this time the balloon was being dragged over level ground, and the speed of the two buffaloes drawing it was increased tenfold.

As they swept by, with the speed of the wind, one of the Indians, by his dress a chief, raised his bow and, taking aim while urging his pony to keep up with the herd, let fly his arrow.

The shaft sped straight through the eye of the giant leader of the herd, and he rolled over with a groan.

The rest of the herd kept right on, and their hoofs speedily crushed out what life was left in their wounded monarch.

The old cow whom the professor's grapnel had hooked was dragged down with the monster bull, and the balloon, relieved of their weight, was shooting upward, when Cody exclaimed:

"Say, there, professor, that's an old friend of mine!"

"He came mighty near being your worst enemy, if the Indian had not shot him," was the reply.

"I mean the Indian, not the buffalo," replied Cody.

The professor was so grateful to the man who had saved him and his companions from what he had been sure would have been their death, had they not met him, that the next moment the car of the balloon was touching the earth, and Cody was warmly grasping the hand of a tall and majestic-looking Indian chief.

"Big Horn!" he exclaimed. "The Pawnees have always been my best friends, and you are the best friend I have among them. I am sure my friends are as grateful as I am for your assistance in our escape."

"I'm in on that, too, pard," cried Nick.

"It was a wonderful deliverance," said the professor.

"Well, we've got enough fresh meat to last us the rest of our lives," remarked Wild Bill, as he stooped over the carcass of the monster buffalo.

The Pawnees had a great feast off the slaughtered buffalo, and their amazement at the balloon, which they examined with the greatest care, was beyond words.

"Truly it is the Wind Spirit of the Great Manitou! Big Horn has never seen anything like it," observed the chief.

"It is the white man's greatest medicine," replied Cody. "To all hostile red men, it is a terrible foe, but it is the friend of the Pawnees and all good Indians who keep their treaties with the white men."

The red chieftain was duly impressed, but when Le-moine asked him, through Buffalo Bill, if he would like to take a short ride up in the clouds, and then be landed back safely on earth again, he recoiled in the utmost horror.

"Big Horn's moccasin will press the earth, or he will ride on his pony," he said, most decidedly. "Never, until he goes to the happy hunting grounds of the Great Manitou, will he sail through the skies."

This was the feeling of all the other Indians when the same invitation was addressed to them.

They had a vast respect for the balloon, but all the wealth of the white men would not have induced them to set foot in it.

"Come," said the professor, at last, "we must be going. The supply of gas is running lower and lower, and we must sail to that cave and replenish it without delay. We have wandered too far afield already in search of these sporting adventures that you are so fond of."

Bidding farewell to the friendly Pawnees, the four friends climbed into the car, drew up the anchor, and were soon sailing away, followed by the admiring and somewhat terrified gaze of the redskins.

CHAPTER X.

THE CAVERN OF NATURAL GAS.

Toward the close of the day, the balloon was anchored at the mouth of the cavern in which, according to the professor's information, the supply of natural gas was to be found.

It was none too soon.

The bag of the monster of the air was already very much deflated, and it was only by dint of throwing out the remainder of their sand ballast that the aeronauts managed to make a safe descent.

"It is too late to do anything to-night," Lemoine announced. "It will take me several hours to fill the balloon, and it is a delicate and difficult operation, that must be done by daylight."

"Couldn't you do it by torchlight?" Wild Bill suggested. The professor laughed loudly.

"And ignite the natural gas and blow ourselves to pieces!" he exclaimed. "That would be good, would it not, Monsieur Hickok?"

Wild Bill hung his head in shame, as he realized the absurdity of his suggestion.

"We must not have a light of any kind while we are in the neighborhood of this cave," the Frenchman continued. "It will be as much as your life is worth to smoke a pipe around here. Remember that."

It was a cheerless camp that the balloonists had that night.

Without a fire or a smoke, they chewed a little dry pemmican and drank water from a spring near by. Far off, in a valley below, they could see the light of a Tejon village; and they wondered, with much misgiving, whether the Tejons had seen them as they descended in the balloon.

If so, they might expect to be attacked that night, or, at latest, soon after dawn in the morning.

The balloon, for the time being, was useless to them; for it lay upon the ground as flat as a pancake.

"This is a night when we must all sit up and watch," said Cody. "We may have to flee for our lives at any moment."

"It would not be wise to make a stand in the cave if we are attacked, because of what the professor says about the inflammability of the natural gas."

"The flash of a gun would set it off, and then we should be done for just as surely as if the redskins lifted our scalps."

"That is quite true," Lemoine agreed. "If the Indians

come, we must run. We must not discharge firearms near here on any account."

The four men waited silently, hour after hour, and at length the attack which they looked for came upon them.

The balloon had been left on the ground, a hundred feet from the mouth of the cave, and the white men were seated on the ground near by it.

Suddenly Buffalo Bill pointed, and the others saw advancing toward the cave through the trees a large number of redskins.

They counted at least fifty, and there were others behind.

They were going straight into the mouth of the cave, where they evidently supposed that the palefaces had taken up their quarters.

"Let us go," whispered Buffalo Bill. "We will look for a place where we can make a stand."

"Did you notice that settler's cabin, about a mile down the slope, as we made the descent?" said Wild Bill. "Let us make for that. It may be deserted. If it is not, so much the better for us. The people will help us to stand off the Tejons. They must be pretty brave folk, to live on the edge of the territory of a dangerous tribe like that."

The scouts arose silently, intending to make their departure unobserved, if possible, when Lemoine stopped them with a gesture.

"Watch! Watch!" he said.

The Indians had stopped at the mouth of the cave, and hesitated.

Evidently they were listening for any sounds that would tell them that the white men were inside.

They heard none, and they gave vent to some low grunts of surprise.

At length several of them entered the mouth of the cave.

"Watch!" whispered Lemoine again.

The words were hardly out of his mouth before one of the redskins made a light with flint and steel, and kindled a torch.

He was standing at the entrance, and so there was not an immediate explosion.

But the white men watched eagerly, certain of what the end would be.

The savage advanced into the cave, holding his torch above his head, and looking round eagerly for his paleface foes.

Suddenly there was a tremendous explosion.

The natural gas that filled the cave had ignited.

Screams and yells followed, but most of the redskins in

the cave had been blown to pieces at once, and were given no time even to utter their death cry.

The greater number of the Tejons, however, had not gone into the cave, and therefore escaped the explosion, though some of them were blown off their feet.

Their frantic cries showed that they were determined to have vengeance for what they doubtless thought was a trick played on them by their paleface foes.

"It's high time we were going," said Buffalo Bill, in a whisper. "They must know that we are not in the cave, or we should have been blown up by the explosion they think we arranged. They will search around for us, and they will be sure to find us, because they will see the balloon."

Suiting the action to the word, the king of the scouts rose to his feet and started off down the tree-clad slope at a smart run, followed by his comrades.

They had not gone far before they were seen by some of the Tejons, who started in hot pursuit, uttering loud yells as they ran.

Luckily the redskins were not mounted, so that the race was an even one, except that the whites had a fairly good start.

Bullet after bullet whizzed after them, but in the dim light the Tejons made poor shooting, and none of the four friends was touched.

"Make for that hut you noticed," cried Buffalo Bill to Wild Bill. "We must get to some place where we can stand them off."

Wild Bill forged ahead and led the way.

Like all good scouts, he had a wonderful sense of location.

He had only seen the hut on the landscape from the balloon, and had given it merely a casual glance, for he had never expected that he would have anything to do with it. But now he led the way to it, through the darkness, as unerringly as if it was his own home.

The redskins gained slightly on their white foes, for Lemoine was not a good runner, and the three scouts, of course, felt obliged to stay behind with him.

At length, as they were beginning to despair of gaining their goal in time, they saw the lights of the hut gleaming a little way ahead of them.

In a few moments they were crying to the people inside to open the door.

Without a second's hesitation, it swung open, and a brawny frontiersman appeared on the threshold to greet them.

In a few words they explained the situation, after they had dashed in and closed and barred the massive door of the log cabin behind them.

"Joe Mullins is the man to stand by you, lads," said the settler, a tall, brawny, bearded man. "Me and the boys and the missus, with your help, ought to be able to stand off any number of these goldurned Tejons."

As he spoke, the Indians came in sight all around the cabin, and uttered yells of rage and defiance.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DEFENSE OF THE CABIN.

The first idea of the Indians was to capture the hut by direct assault. They battered at the door and tried to gain entrance through the narrow windows.

Fortunately for the defenders of the hut, however, the place had been built, as were most houses on the Indian border in that day, with the idea of withstanding just such an attack as was now taking place.

The door was of stout logs, strengthened by heavy iron bars, which could be dropped into position in case of emergency, the windows were small and stout framed, and loopholes commanded every point of vantage.

A few well-aimed shots by the defenders speedily did severe execution among the redskins, and the survivors of the first fire were prudent enough to withdraw as soon as they saw the execution their opponents were capable of accomplishing.

Leaving the dead braves on the ground, they hastily got out of rifle range.

Possibly it was only a breathing spell, but at all events, it gave the defenders time in which to review their position.

The light of indomitable resolution still shone in Buffalo Bill's eyes. The fighting spirit of the man was alive, as several of the redskins had discovered to their cost.

Nor was his instinct of politeness to women dormant. Removing his broad sombrero, he bowed with his inimitable courtesy to Mrs. Mullins.

"Madam," he said, "had it not been for you and your brave husband and sons, the Indians would surely have had our scalps."

"Great alfalfa!" chimed in Nick Wharton, "if them Tejons had got us we'd have been gone coons, for sure."

"That's right, Nick," assented Wild Bill. "They're a bloodthirsty lot of savages!"

"Well, a miss is as good as a mile," remarked the professor.

Cody then turned to one of the Mullins boys and inquired concerning the stock of provisions they had, in case they were called upon to stand a siege of several days.

"I reckon there's grub enough for a week," was the reply. "As fur water, thar's a fine well just outside, and a barrel full in the next room. As fur the guns, we've got lots of shells fur them."

"What about the roof?" was the next question of the king of the scouts, who never let any point of importance pass when he was learning the strength and possibilities of defense a place offered.

The boy and his mother exchanged glances.

"We did intend to put on a green hide or bark roof, but it never got done. The roof we have now is just plain dry thatch."

"As good a mark for flaming arrows as the Indians could desire," was the short reply of the scout.

"Flaming arrows!" exclaimed the woman, bursting into tears. "That all comes along of your shiftlessness, Jim. Oh! sir," she exclaimed, turning to Cody, "do you think they'll burn the house about our ears?"

"That, madam, will depend on how we defend it," was the reply of the king of the scouts. "But from what I know of the Tejons they aren't a nation to quit right off like this."

"You think they'll come back, then?"

"I am sure of it."

"We'll give them a warm reception," said Nick.

"Yes, a few good volleys at close range will do some good," remarked the professor, with a martial air. His experiences with Buffalo Bill and his friends had made him feel like a veteran Indian fighter.

Supper was served and dispatched, and there was no sign of the Indians. After the meal, Buffalo Bill assigned the little garrison to sentry duty. The Mullins boys were to take the first watch.

There was a bright moon shining, and as it had risen at almost the same time as daylight had faded from the sky, Buffalo Bill knew that no interval of darkness had elapsed in which the crafty redskins could have got near to the house unseen.

Shortly after he had posted the sentries, however, he observed, with some concern, that clouds were rapidly drifting across the sky—heavy rain clouds that threatened shortly to eclipse the moonlight altogether.

An hour later, the night was black as a pocket. Buffalo Bill redoubled his vigilance in this misfortune.

It was well he did so, for, as the clouds broke for a moment and the radiance of the moonlight streamed through, his keen eyes at once perceived something that the others had not yet discovered.

A band of Tejons in full war paint were creeping on the house under the cover of the darkness!

At the same moment the rifle of one of the Mullins boys and Nick Wharton's weapon cracked, and two of the advancing braves fell.

"Steady, boys!" said the knight of the plains, as he observed the execution his companions had done. "Wait till we get 'em near the house, and at close range."

In accordance with their chief's advice, the defenders of the Mullins ranch reserved their fire.

When the Indians were within a few feet of the door Cody gave the word to fire.

Spruts of flame darted out from the loopholes, and half a dozen of the redskins were stretched upon the ground, either dead or wounded.

Howling with rage, and in many cases with the pains of wounds also, the survivors beat a hasty retreat, intending to work out other plans for the capture of the little fort that was being so well defended.

Before long they began to creep toward the house on their stomachs through the long grass, and to fire lighted arrows at the roof, as the border king had expected they would do.

The arrows fell short at first, for the Tejons had acquired such a healthy respect for the rifles of the defenders that they were chary of approaching near to the house. By degrees, however, they gained courage, spurred on by their chiefs.

It was not long, then, before several blazing arrows were sticking in the roof and setting fire to the sun-dried thatch.

The smell of the burning thatch, and the volume of smoke that came from it, soon warned the defenders of the peril that confronted them.

Mullins seized a bucket and filled it with water from a big barrel which was standing in the kitchen.

"I'm to blame for this, and it's up to me to put it out," he shouted.

In another moment he would have unbarred the door and dashed outside to climb upon the roof, but he was prevented by Buffalo Bill.

"That's no good," said the border king. "You'd only

throw your life away for no good purpose. I've got a better scheme."

"What is it?"

The knight of the plains mounted on the table, snatched up the lamp, removed the glass, and held the flame to the inside of the thatched roof, which, with his tall stature, he could easily reach.

With great care, he burned a hole right through the roof from the inside, dashing water around the sides of the burning hole, so that the fire should not become general, and set the whole cabin blazing.

His comrades watched his strange maneuver, breathless with interest.

When he had burned the hole through, Cody mounted on a chair, which he placed on the table, and pushed his head and shoulders out into the air. He called for buckets of water, and proceeded to throw them down over the thatch.

In a few minutes he had extinguished the flames caused by the redskins' fiery missiles.

"Come down!" cried Mullins. "The Injuns will pot you, sure."

It seemed as if it would be impossible for the gallant scout to escape the fire of the enemy, which was now concentrated upon him.

Bullets whistled around his head, and many arrows were sent whizzing toward him, but the border king would not desert his post of honor and danger.

Turning his head downward for a moment, he called to his comrades to soak blankets and pass them up to him, so that the fiery arrows of the Indians would fall harmlessly upon them and go out.

When he had got the blankets, he climbed right through the hole onto the roof, in full view of the redskins, and spread them out all over the thatch.

This was his time of greatest peril.

The moon showed through a rift in the clouds, revealing him plainly standing there, occupied with his task.

The war whoops of the redskins greeted him upon every hand, and a perfect fusillade of bullets began to strike the roof like hail.

With his usual remarkable good luck, however, the border king was not even touched.

He finished his work, taking care that there was not an inch of the roof left uncovered by a wet blanket, and then he waved his hand defiantly toward his hidden foes, and then swung himself back through the hole in the roof down to the ground.

"Pard, you're the bravest and coolest hand I ever met," said Mullins to him, warmly.

"Nonsense," was the modest reply of the knight of the plains. "Anyone here would have done the same thing if they had happened to think of it. I am easier in my mind now."

"So long as they don't set fire to the place, I think we can hold out until help comes, or until they get tired of the siege and give it up as a bad business."

CHAPTER XII.

THE TEJONS ARE BADLY BEATEN.

Although baffled in their efforts to burn down the house, the Tejons did not show any disposition to give up the siege.

They kept a close ring around the place all night, firing a few shots every now and then to remind the defenders that they were on the alert, and that it was hopeless to try to break through and seek safety in flight.

Just before daylight they gathered themselves together for a supreme effort. They hoped that they had worn the palefaces out by giving them no rest all night.

They rushed suddenly in a body toward the door of the cabin, carrying a huge tree trunk for a battering ram.

"Steady, boys!" said Buffalo Bill, who, by a sort of natural instinct, was looked to by all the other men as their commander in this emergency. "Pick off the men with the trunk. Don't mind so much about the others. We can attend to them later."

His words were heeded, and the result was that the battering ram fell to the ground before it ever touched the door. All the men who were carrying it had been shot down.

Others stooped to pick up the fallen log, but they also were marked men, easily picked off by the sharpshooters inside the cabin, who were all fine marksmen.

While the Indians were hesitating over the log, at a distance of about thirty yards from the door, a bugle call rang out on the other side of the house.

Next moment, a troop of the Seventh Cavalry, accompanied by half a dozen scouts well known to Cody and his comrades, came galloping around to the front.

In the dim grayness of the early morning, both defenders and attackers had been too much taken up with the fighting to notice the approach of this new force; but now the Tejons halted, panic-stricken, as the soldiers charged down among them, cutting them down with their sabers

and shooting them with their revolvers and carbines right and left.

Escape was out of the question. for the redskins had no horses, and the troopers were all well mounted. There was no good cover near by to which to flee.

The survivors of that first terrible charge at once threw down their arms, put their hands above their head, and begged for quarter.

The officer in command shouted to his men to stop their work of slaughter, and the Indians were collected together in a group as prisoners, under a guard.

Buffalo Bill was soon shaking hands with the officer, a major named Wheatley, whom he knew very well, as they had taken part in more than one Indian campaign together.

"We heard rumors of troubles among the Tejons at the fort," said the major, "so that luckily we were on the alert. We had scouting parties out, and a force of troopers waiting, with their horses saddled and bridled, all ready to ride to the first point where danger threatened. The sound of the firing here was heard by some of our scouts, and here we are."

"And none too soon for us, I can assure you, major," said Cody. "But what are you going to do with the prisoners? Will you take them all to the fort?"

The officer looked perplexed.

There were about forty prisoners, and over seventy of their comrades lay dead upon the ground around the house.

"We have no accommodation at the fort for so many, and I doubt whether the commandant would thank me for bringing them to him," said the major. "Would it not be well to pick out three or four of the head men, and let the others go back to their village?"

"Yes, I think it would," said Cody. "The tribe has had a lesson that will not be forgotten in a hurry. I doubt whether it would be advisable to take the prisoners to the fort, and have them tried.

"The great thing to do is to prevent this little trouble with the Tejons from developing into a serious Indian uprising. The best way to do that, it seems to me, would be to let these men go back to their tribe and tell what has happened to them."

"I quite agree with you," said the major. "We will set them all at liberty, except three of the chief, or head braves, whom my scouts will pick out."

"Will you let me speak to the prisoners before they go?" asked Buffalo Bill. "I would like to play on their super-

stitions a bit, so as to make them still more anxious to bury the hatchet."

The major gladly consented, and the king of the scouts walked over toward the dejected looking band of Indians, and ordered them to be ranged up in front of him.

Speaking to them in their own barbarous Tejon dialect, he said:

"Listen carefully to the words of Long Hair, Oh, ye foolish and wicked ones, and take care that ye profit thereby. You know me, and you know that I speak with a straight tongue.

"You thought that because the Wind Spirit of the Great Manitou had descended to earth, to rest there for a brief season, you had us at your mercy. But you have seen that the Great Manitou can look after his children whether they are with the Wind Spirit or without it.

"Impious ones, who would fight against the wisdom and power of the Wind Spirit, go your way to your tribe and to the other tribes, and say to them that the red men must bury the hatchet, unless they would be utterly destroyed.

"If you should fight against the white men, lacking the magical power of the Wind Spirit to aid you, your defeat and death will surely follow.

"Your young braves will be cut down like young saplings before the breath of the storm. Your children will die of wasting diseases, your crops will fail, and your old chiefs and counsellors will become foolish.

"But if you till the land and live in peace, the Wind Spirit shall work you no harm, and your tribe shall increase and prosper."

This little oration, delivered with the appropriate Indian gestures, had a great effect upon the redskin captives.

All of them had seen the Wind Spirit, as they called the balloon, sailing through the sky at some time or another; and they were very much scared of it.

One by one, they filed past the border king, promising to obey his commands, and offering three of their leaders as hostages for their good behavior in the future.

"Will they keep their word, Monsieur Cody?" asked the professor, who had been standing just behind him when he was making his speech.

"They will keep it for a time, at all events," said the border king, "but it is not in the nature of some Indian tribes to ever keep the hatchet buried for very long.

"It is so with the Blackfeet, the Sioux, the Apaches, and so it is with these Tejons, from what I've seen and heard of them.

"When they get hold of a lonely settler or trapper, they will not hesitate to capture him and torture him to death, in spite of all the fine promises they are making now."

"Then, we must still be on our guard?"

"Yes. I think we are safe enough when we are with the balloon, even on the ground, for they are scared to death of it."

"I hope they have not destroyed it."

"Little fear of that. I don't think there's a Tejon who would dare to touch it, after what the redskins have seen it do."

"Well, let us hasten to the cave, and see whether it is all right. If so, I will fill the bag with the natural gas, and we will sail back to 'Frisco."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE LAST OF THE BALLOON.

The four friends bade farewell to the Mullinses and the soldiers who had come to their rescue so opportunely, and then made their way back to the cave.

As Buffalo Bill had foreseen, the Indians had not harmed the balloon or its car in any way. They had not even stolen any of the stores in the car, though some of them were things highly prized by the redskins.

This was to be accounted for, in a measure, by the fact that they had hastened to pursue the whites when the latter fled to the log hut; but it was mainly due to the superstitious fear in which the Tejons held the Wind Spirit.

"Goldurn it, professor, but how are we goin' to blow up yer blessed bag ag'in?" asked old Nick Wharton. "All the nateral gas got blown up in thet thar big explosion when the Tejon fooled around with a light."

The professor smiled at the old trapper's ignorance.

"*Mon ami*, you are a great hunter, but you know very little about natural laws," he retorted. "This natural gas comes bubbling up from nature's vast reservoir all the time, just as artificial gas is supplied through a pipe. The gas that was ignited has been replaced by a fresh supply long before this, so we shall have all we need to expand the balloon."

The scouts discovered that this was the fact, and they

aided the professor in his work so effectually that the balloon was ready for another ascension in a few hours.

"If we strike favorable air currents, we ought to reach San Francisco in a day and a half," said the professor.

"But we are like a ship at sea. We depend upon the wind entirely. We may be becalmed."

"Or even wrecked," said Cody.

"That is not so likely. The main danger is running into the top of a mountain, as we have already done. We must look out for that, but when you are among the clouds it is not easy to see ahead quick enough to make an ascension and dodge the danger.

"There is only one other great peril in ballooning, to my mind, and that is being caught in the center of a bad thunderstorm. A flash of lightning may split the bag and let the gas escape. Then you may say your prayers, if you are pious men. This has never happened to me, but it did happen to a friend of mine who made an ascension at the time I was away at the South Pole, exploring the marvelous mysteries of the Antarctic Circle, where——"

"Say, professor," Cody cut in, eager to keep the excitable monomaniac off this pet subject of his, "doesn't the bag of a balloon ever burst from the pressure of the gas inside it?"

The Frenchman's lips curled.

"Not if the balloonist knows anything of his business," he said. "You would not let your gun burst by keeping it in such bad condition that rust choked up the barrel, would you?"

"No."

"Well, so it is with us. We have a valve to let the gas escape from if its pressure becomes too great."

"Professor," said Wild Bill, breaking into the conversation and interrupting the Frenchman's little scientific dissertation. "You were talking about the danger of a thunderstorm just now. Here is one coming up! Do you see that heavy bank of clouds over there? We are driving right into them, and the storm will burst pretty soon."

The professor looked at the bank of clouds with considerable apprehension.

"This is the worst peril we have faced yet," he said. "It is greater than when we were towed by the buffaloes or besieged by the Indians in that hut.

"I will try to dodge the storm, but I fear I can't do

better than skirt along the edge of it. Still, to avoid the center will be a great point gained."

The Frenchman, as his companions had proved, did not lack courage, but his face was now the color of ashes.

He thoroughly understood the danger to which he was exposed, but the scouts, not knowing so much about ballooning, were not so nervous.

The bank of clouds spread with alarming rapidity until it covered the sky. The wind rose in eddying gusts, rocking the car violently, and making the scouts feel as if they were in a ship in a heavy sea.

Crash! crash! crash!

Heaven's artillery was discharged with frightful violence, and the storm burst in all its fury.

In all their experience on the plains, the three scouts had never known one like it—never known one half so violent.

The rain came down in sheets, drenching them to the skin; and then the lightning began to play all around them.

"We must descend at once," the professor shouted in Cody's ear. "We are taking too many chances up here."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a thunderbolt struck the bag of the balloon.

The four men were hurled to the bottom of the car by the force of the stroke, and for a moment they were blinded and stunned.

"What's the damage?" called out Buffalo Bill, rising giddily to his feet.

The professor looked upward.

There was no need for him to speak.

The loud whistling of the gas as it poured through a huge rent in the side of the balloon showed that the damage was beyond repair.

Already they were shooting downward at a frightful rate, as the bag grew every moment limper and limper.

"Heave out ballast—but not too much," shouted the professor. "We shall need some badly when we get near the earth."

Two bags were thrown over, slightly checking the downward rush, but only for a moment.

Bag after bag had to be hurled down to make up in a measure for the escape of the gas, and when they were

within about three-quarters of a mile of the earth they had none left, and were shooting downward more quickly than ever.

"Overboard with everything—quick! A second may make the difference between life and death."

Suiting the action to the word, the professor seized the iron stove and sent it whirling down.

Provisions, water, guns, ammunition, scientific instruments, every article in the car followed, but still they were coming down to earth with a speed that threatened to break every bone in their bodies.

Frantically, the professor rushed to his steering apparatus, and turned the guiding wheel over hard.

He had seen a small lake a little to the right, and he wanted to fall into it, instead of onto the ground.

Flabby though the balloon was, it responded to his effort.

Splash!

The car hit the water, throwing the spray right over the top of the balloon, so great was the violence of the descent.

The car floated, held up by the buoyancy of the little gas still left in the bag.

"We must swim ashore," said the professor, as soon as he found that none of his comrades was hurt.

"The car will not float long. The gas will soon be all out of the bag, and when the silk is saturated with water it will sink and drag us down with it.

"The balloon is done for," he continued, almost with tears in his eyes. "It only remains to save our lives."

The men swam to the shore of the lake, which was not more than half a mile distant, and there they were greeted by a party of friendly Indians, who had seen their frightful fall from the clouds, and were inclined to treat them as if they were gods, because they had escaped death.

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EXCITING HUNT.

The adventurers stayed among the friendly redskins for a few days, and then they started to make the best of their way back to San Francisco.

The Indians, a poor branch of the Digger tribe, were not able to provide them with horses; and therefore they were obliged to travel on foot.

They were more than two hundred miles from 'Frisco, and they had to journey through a country which at that time was wild and unsettled. Their trip proved to be an exciting and adventurous one. In getting rid of the balloon, they had by no means finished with their adventures.

On the second day after they left the Digger village, they were faced with the problem of having to hunt for their dinner. They had brought only a little jerked meat with them, and that had already been finished. But they were in a good game country, and three such excellent hunters as Buffalo Bill, Wild Bill and Nick Wharton had no reason to be afraid that they would starve under the circumstances.

"You had better remain behind in the camp, professor, while we go out with our rifles and see what we can get," said Buffalo Bill, to the Frenchman.

"And for why, *mon ami*, should I remain behind? Why should I not accompany you on your hunt?"

"Well, you see, you don't know much about hunting, do you?"

"No, I do not, I know nothing of it."

"Have you ever handled a gun?"

"I fired a pistol once. It was in Paris. I fought a duel with a brother scientist, because we quarreled as to what was the proper way to steer balloons."

"If that is all the experience you have had with firearms, I would advise you not to come with us. What would you do if you got cornered by a grizzly?"

"I would do the best I could, my friend. And permit me to tell you that I know as much about hunting as you knew about ballooning when you came with me in what Monsieur Wharton was pleased to call my gas bag."

"By thunder, you have caught me fairly there, professor! Well, come along; but stick as closely to us as you can. In this country there are not only grizzlies and mountain lions, but plenty of other bears and wolves, too."

"I am not afraid of any of them," said Lemoine, picking up a heavybore rifle which he had brought with him

in the car of the balloon, although he had never used it except in the blockhouse fight, where he had done very little execution. "No, I am not afraid of all the wild beasts in all of your Wild West."

"I don't believe there's anything you are afraid of, professor, and that's a fact!" said Buffalo Bill, who had conceived a great admiration for the pluck of the Frenchman.

Lemoine blushed with pleasure at this compliment, for he had a great opinion of the border king, and valued his words highly.

The hunt was a successful one from the start. Old Nick Wharton bagged a couple of small deer and Wild Bill shot a black bear. Buffalo Bill had no luck for several hours, and neither had the professor.

The latter at first heeded the warning of the border king to stay with the others, but afterward he wandered away by himself for about half a mile, looking for game; and then, feeling tired, he stretched himself out under a tree, intending to rest for a short time.

He was more tired than he thought, and in a few minutes he had fallen fast asleep—a very foolish thing to do in a country where wild beasts of at least half a dozen different kinds abounded.

He had not slept for more than about a quarter of an hour when he was aroused by a low, deep growl, almost in his very ear.

The Frenchman, although not familiar with grizzlies and their ways, felt instinctively that he was at the mercy of one even before he opened his eyes. The most dreaded of all bears—the worst foe of the Western hunter—had come creeping upon him as he slept. He was lying on his left side, and the beast had come up behind him.

Lemoine was not only an exceptionally brave man, but a man of the coolest nerve in the presence of danger. At other times he was apt to be excitable, but when peril threatened he was as cool as a cucumber.

Now he opened his eyes cautiously, but he did not move even so much as a finger.

The beast's nose touched the man's shoulder, and he sniffed at his face. His muzzle tickled the man's cheek, but still Lemoine did not move, although he expected to be seized by those terrible teeth every moment.

If he had raised his hand or had tried to get to his feet, the bear would almost certainly have seized him at once. But as it was, the beast believed that he had found a dead man, and was inclined to investigate the matter. He had his lair, as was afterward found out, within a few hundred feet of the place which the professor had chosen for his nap.

After a minute or two of sniffing, a paw was placed upon the man's shoulder, and he was turned over on the broad of his back.

Opening his eyes very slightly, and peering through the slits, he caught sight of the paw. As he had supposed, he was indeed in the clutch of a grizzly, and it was one of the largest of its kind.

Appalled though he was by this terrible knowledge, the plucky Frenchman did not lose his wits or abandon hope that he would come safely out of the adventure. He knew little about hunting, but in the course of his scientific studies he had read a great deal about natural history, and he was therefore aware that most savage animals would not feed upon anything that they have not killed with their own paws—at least, when they are in a wild state.

When the man had been turned over on his back, the bear sat up like a dog and growled again—a low and fierce growl that might well make the blood of the bravest man run cold.

Lemoine was wearing a black frock coat, just as he would have done in Paris, and upon it there were two rows of pearl buttons. These seemed to be objects of the greatest curiosity to the bear. He touched all of them in succession, and even pulled at them slightly with his paw.

The professor's black silk hat of the latest Parisian style was lying on the grass near to his head. The bear reached for it and began to play with it in a frolicsome way, as a puppy plays with a glove or a rag.

First, he struck it with his paw to the right, and then with the other paw to the left, and then he jumped after it, seized it with his teeth, and gave it a toss into the air, repeating the performance again and again. He played with the hat for at least ten minutes, and then he sat up, yawned several times, and presently returned to his victim.

He took hold of the man's watch chain in his teeth, but there was a sharp-pointed charm attached to it which hurt his tongue. With a low growl he drew back, and seemed to wonder what he would do next.

Then a faint sound in the wood near by—the cracking of a twig—gave him a sudden alarm. It had doubtless been made by one of the other three hunters, thought the professor. He wished most profoundly that they would come up, shoot the beast, and rescue him from his very unpleasant predicament.

At the sound in the wood, the animal turned like a flash and stood on guard, rearing up on his haunches.

For five minutes he stood watching and sniffing and growling. His ears were laid back, his fur bristled with rage, and one of his forepaws was uplifted, as if in readiness to strike.

Had any of the hunters happened to come that way at that moment, they would have run the most imminent danger of death.

As the sound was not repeated, the bear finally turned round and lay down on the ground, with his head on his forepaws, and he steadily fastened his eyes on the professor's face. There followed a long five minutes of this watchfulness, during which the Frenchman seemed to live a month at least for every minute.

Then the beast slowly rose up, and with a soft touch of his right paw turned the man over on his face. After sniffing at his head he ran his nose down the body and leg, clear down to the ankle.

One leg of the professor's trousers had been pulled up, leaving the ankle bare. The bear licked the flesh two or three times with his tongue, and it felt like the rasp of a file.

The taste did not seem to tickle his palate, for some reason or other, and he returned to his former playful mood.

Once, as he pawed at the coat a claw caught it and ripped it open, like a sharp knife would have done.

Once, too, he stood with his paw on the back of the man's hand, but luckily the claws were sheathed, and so the paw felt as soft as a ball of velvet.

For at least a dozen times the professor was rolled over by the bear; and the beast leaped over him, back and forth,

like a dog at play. He seemed to get a great deal of amusement out of this, which was lucky, as it kept him good-natured.

He finally fastened his teeth in the man's vest and lifted him clear off the ground, as easily as a boy might lift a kitten.

Lemoine had a revolver in his pocket, which had been lent to him by Wild Bill. As his right hand fell down when the beast swung him from the ground he felt this weapon.

He might have drawn it and had the good luck to kill the bear, or a shot might have frightened it away; but these chances were too remote to be worth taking into account.

Lemoine felt that the animal was holding him up to see if there was any life in him, and was hoping to feel him make some move.

If there had been so much as the twist of a hand or the opening of an eye, death would in all probability have come swift and certain. But, by a supreme effort of his will power, the professor held himself rigid and did not move a muscle. After swinging the man in pendulum fashion for a full minute, the beast laid him down as carefully as if he had been a baby, gnawed his vest in two and pulled it off. Carrying a fragment of it in his mouth, he ambled away, and was hidden in a few moments in the thick brushwood near by.

After lying still for a quarter of an hour or more, the professor arose cautiously and hastened back to the camp near by, with his rifle in hand, ready for use in case he met the bear again.

The three scouts were already there, and when he told them of his thrilling experience they immediately volunteered to hunt down the bear and get revenge for the fright he had suffered.

Buffalo Bill, leading the party, soon picked up the beast's trail. In a short time he had tracked it to its lair in the thickest part of the bush, where it had a small cave.

As they came to the mouth of this cave they saw the bear sitting up on his haunches, and growling fiercely. He was working himself up into a passion, as he scented his worst enemy—man.

Suddenly he charged out with a terrible growl, and leaped at Wild Bill, who had ventured too near, knocking him down with a single blow of his huge paw.

At that moment the rifles of Buffalo Bill, Nick Wharton and of the professor cracked simultaneously.

The bear, with two bullets in its brain and one through the heart, bounded high in the air, and then fell dead.

Wild Bill was badly scratched and dazed by the knock-down blow he had received, but he was not seriously injured.

"I guess that this is about the biggest grizzly that I ever saw," said Buffalo Bill, as he skinned the beast and cut off some choice steaks for the evening meal.

As the professor touched the terrible claws and looked upon the rows of strong teeth in the blood-stained mouth, he realized how wonderful had been his escape when the beast caught him napping.

CHAPTER XV.

A BRUSH WITH ROAD AGENTS.

At sundown, two days later, as they were nearing Frisco, Buffalo Bill and his companions reached the cabin of a settler. The king of the scouts asked an old woman who was smoking a pipe on the doorstep if they could find lodging there for the night, for which they would be willing to pay.

"Stranger," she replied, as she slowly sized the border king up, "my old man tackled a b'ar up there by them rocks three years ago and got so badly bitten and clawed that he died next day."

"You have my sympathy," Buffalo Bill replied.

"I had a son Joe and a son Bill," she continued, "but Joe he climbed a tree to shake down a coon, and fell fifty feet and broke his neck. He was dead as a doornail when he struck the airth."

"His was a sad fate, ma'am."

"Then, my son Bill must go lookin' among the rocks for a wounded wild cat. He found her. She also found him. Bill lived a week after they brung him home."

"You have been truly unfortunate," Buffalo Bill ventured to say.

"Old man gone; Joe gone; Bill gone, and only me and Linda left. That's Linda there choppin' a rabbit out of a log," pointing to an ill-favored woman near by.

"And do you think you could put us up for the night?"

"Is that all yo' is wantin'?"

"Yes, that's all."

"Don't want me for a wife?"

"Well, hardly."

"And don't want Linda?"

"No."

"Nor your pards, neither?"

"I guess not."

"Jest want supper and breakfast and lodgings?"

"That's all, and I shall take it as a great favor and pay you well."

"Well, you kin come right in—and we'll do the best we kin, but I'm tellin' yo' that if some critter comes along who wants to marry me or Linda, you'll have to rout out in the middle of the night and walk on. We shall feel sorry to disturb yo' both, but as a lone widder and a lone gal we ain't lettin' any golden chances slip by us."

On this half-hearted invitation, Buffalo Bill and his three companions entered. The cabin was situated in such a lonely place, and so far from a neighbor's, that the border king had a curiosity to know how the old mountain woman and her daughter entertained each other. When they had talked for a little while, he asked:

"Do you and your daughter see many people here?"

"Skassly ever see anybody," was her reply.

"Then, you have to depend entirely upon yourselves for society?"

"That's it."

"And what do you find to talk about?" he continued, having noticed that neither mother nor daughter was inclined for conversation.

"What do we find, Linda?" the mother appealed to her daughter.

"Heaps, I reckon," she said. "When breakfast is ready in the mawnin' I says to you to sot down to co'n coffee and hoecake."

"Yes."

"And when it's noon and yo' are hangin' about I says that hoecake and co'n coffee is ready."

"Yes."

"And when it's candlelight I sort o' jerks my head and yo' hitches up to sorghum and hoecake and wants to know why we don't hev bacon. Ain't thet talk 'nuff, stranger?"

"But there's the evenings," Buffalo Bill suggested.

"Yes, ther's the evenings, of co'se, and I says I reckon it will be a fine day to-morrer, and ma, she reckons the same thing, and we wind up the clock and go to bed. Oh, I don't reckon we ar' sufferin' to death for the want of somebody to gab to."

"Well, boys," said Buffalo Bill, "we had better go to bed early. We've done some pretty strenuous traveling, and we've got some more before us yet before we get to 'Frisco."

The four companions found no trouble in getting to sleep, for they were thoroughly tired out.

They had not been in bed more than two or three hours when the king of the scouts, who was in the habit of sleeping with one eye open, was awakened by the clatter of horses riding up to the door of the cabin. This noise was followed immediately by a couple of pistol shots.

"Road agents, I'll wager," muttered the border king to himself.

He rose softly, took up his revolvers, and peered out through a crack in the door.

By the light of the moon, he saw three men outside, and one glance was enough to show him that his suspicion of their character was correct.

One of the men, whose pistol was still smoking from the shots he had fired to awaken the inmates, had dismounted from his horse and was walking up to hammer on the door.

The other two men sat upon their horses, holding their rifles ready to fire, if it was necessary.

All three men wore black masks, and looked what they were—road agents and frontier desperadoes of the worst type.

"Now, then, old woman, get up and open the door," yelled the leader of the party. "We hear you've got some guests to-night, and we're going to hold them up."

The women sprang out of their beds in the other room and rushed to Buffalo Bill, in wild alarm, when they discovered who their midnight visitors were.

"Open the door," whispered the king of the scouts. "As they come in, my friends and I will shoot them down. When you've opened the door, both of you must run back into your rooms without a second's delay."

Nick Wharton and Wild Bill had awakened by this time and had come to the side of their friend, ready with their guns.

The woman was used through many years' experience to the peril and adventure of the frontier. Recovering from her fright, she did as Buffalo Bill commanded just as the road agent outside, growing impatient, was beginning to batter the door down.

"Now, then, old woman, where in thunder——" he began.

Before he could say any more, his eyes fell upon the three scouts, who were standing before him, grim and silent, with their guns in their hands.

He turned as white as a sheet and his jaw dropped. He realized that his last hour had come. Falling back a pace, he plucked out his revolver, which he had put back into his belt when the door was opened.

Before he could get the drop, Nick Wharton shot him through the head, and he died almost before his body struck the floor.

The two other bandits had dismounted from their horses to follow their leader into the house, but when they heard the shot they hastily turned and ran toward their animals.

Before they could mount, the three scouts were outside, shouting to them to halt.

They did so, but instead of throwing up their hands, they began to fire upon their pursuers. One bullet grazed Nick Wharton's temple, but in the return volley both of the outlaws were slain. The scouts returned to the hut, found a couple of shovels, and dug a deep grave some distance away, in which they buried the three bodies.

When they went back to their room, they found the Frenchman was still peacefully sleeping. The shots had

not awakened him. The widow, however, was wide awake and waiting for them.

"I'm truly sorry, madam," said the knight of the plains, "that your sleep should have been disturbed in this very unpleasant manner."

"I'm mighty glad, boss, that it was," returned the woman. "Those rascals have been the pest of the country for months, and they are well out of the way."

"Nevertheless, it must have been a great shock to you to see them killed like that," remarked Buffalo Bill.

"Nary a shock," replied the tough old widow. "I've seen too many good men shot to worry about a few bad ones now."

They all slept undisturbed for the rest of the night, and the four friends reached Frisco safely, without any further perils or adventures.

The professor wanted them to come with him on another balloon trip at some future time, but they thanked him warmly and declined.

Their opinion of ballooning was tersely summed up by old Nick Wharton.

"Waal, gosh darn it, I wouldn't hev missed it fur half a dozen ranches; but may I be everlastingly scalped if I wants any more of it."

As for the professor, he continued his career as an aeronaut, but it was in other lands. Never again did he frighten the Indians of the Far West with his Wind Spirit.

THE END.

The next story in THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES to be published next week, will be called "Buffalo Bill's Death Thrust; or, Snake Eye's Silent Doom." It tells of one of the greatest perils ever encountered by the border king, and the marvelous manner in which he escaped from a party of hostile Indians, who thought they had him cornered. Snake Eye was one of the worst enemies Buffalo Bill ever encountered among the redskins, and the story of how he finally overcame him will make good reading for any boy who has a healthy taste for the literature of the Wild West. Don't forget to buy the story next week, No. 229.

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